

**POVERTY AND LIVELIHOODS: WHOSE REALITY COUNTS?**

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## SUMMARY OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

Anti-poverty rhetoric is widespread, and some indicators of human wellbeing have improved. Current conditions are, though, often appalling, trends in many places negative, and future prospects bad for hundreds of millions of people.

In assessing conditions, and seeing what to do, professionals' realities are universal, reductionist, standardised and stable. Those of economists dominate, expressed in poverty thinking concerned with income-poverty, and employment thinking concerned with jobs. Both project Northern, more industrial and urban, conditions, concerns and categories onto Southern, more agricultural and rural, realities. Both have force but miss much and mislead. Professional biases have been challenged but they remain deep, secure and distorting.

The realities of poor people are local, complex, diverse and dynamic. Income-poverty, though important, is only one aspect of deprivation. Participatory appraisal confirms many dimensions and criteria of disadvantage, illbeing and wellbeing as people experience them. In addition to poverty, these include social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonal deprivation, powerlessness and humiliation.

Sustainable livelihoods are an objective on which most poor people and professionals can agree. Household livelihood strategies often involve different members in diverse activities and sources of support at different times of the year. Many of these, like home gardening, exploiting common property resources, share-rearing livestock, family splitting, and stinting are largely unseen by normal professionals. A sustainable livelihood-intensive strategy stresses natural resources management, redistribution of livelihood resources, prices and payments, health, abolishing restrictions and hassle, and safety nets for poor people at bad times.

A paradigm of reversals and altruism demands a new professionalism. The paradigm and the new professionalism put people before things, and poor people and their priorities first of all. The challenges presented are institutional, professional and personal. The policy and practical means to promote and sustain wellbeing, livelihoods and equity include two complementary agendas, one conventional and one new. Underlying the new agenda is the basic human right of poor people to conduct their own analysis. Four elements in this new agenda are:

- \* analysis and action by local people, especially the poor
- \* sustainable livelihoods

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<sup>1</sup> For insights into North-South, upper-lower relationships I am grateful to Jenny Chambers, and for comments on drafts of this paper to Rosalind Eyben and Gunilla Olsson. The usual disclaimers about responsibility apply.

- \* decentralisation, democracy and diversity
- \* professional and personal change

Reversals and a radical rethink are required if the realities of the poor are to count at the Social Development Summit.

### Glossary of Meanings

Much confusion, and some false consensus, come from vague and different uses of words. The senses in which some key words will be used in this paper are as follows:

- \* deprivation refers to lacking what is needed for wellbeing and a full and good life. Its dimensions are physical, social, economic, political and psychological. It includes forms of disadvantage such as physical weakness, isolation, poverty, vulnerability, and powerlessness.
- \* development means good change
- \* employment means having a job, with an employer who provides remuneration (usually a wage or salary) for work done. It does not include sporadic casual labour.
- \* illbeing is the experience of bad quality of life
- \* income-poor and income-poverty refer to low per capita income
- \* livelihood refers to the means of gaining a living, including livelihood capabilities, tangible assets, and intangible assets (Chambers and Conway 1992). Employment can provide a livelihood, but most livelihoods of the poor are based on multiple activities and sources of food, income and security
- \* normal professionalism is the thinking, values, methods and behaviour dominant in a profession or discipline <sup>2</sup>
- \* paradigm means a coherent and mutually supporting pattern of concepts, values, methods and action, amenable to wide application
- \* poor, as the adjective for poverty, means more than income-poor, and applies also to lack of assets, access and basic needs. I have also lapsed into the common broader usage of poor as a synonym for deprived, that is, lacking what is needed for wellbeing and a full and good life.
- \* poverty refers to lack of physical necessities, assets, and income. It includes but is more than being income-poor. Poverty can be distinguished from other dimensions of deprivation such as physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness with which it interacts (Chambers 1983: 108-139)
- \* social development means change to "enhanced individual and community wellbeing, and autonomy, within an integrated, equitable and just society" (Eyben 1993)

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<sup>2</sup> Normal professionalism and the new paradigm are elaborated on in Challenging the Professions: frontiers for rural development (1993) chapters 1, 5, 6 and 8. I apologise to any reader who finds the references to these rather cryptic in this paper

- \* sustainable livelihood refers to a living which is adequate for the satisfaction of basic needs, and secure against anticipated shocks and stresses<sup>3</sup>
- \* vulnerability means "defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to risk, shocks and stress" (IDS 1989:1). It is not the same as income-poverty or poverty.
- \* wellbeing is the experience of good quality of life

Thus wellbeing and illbeing refer more to experience, poverty more to physical lack, and deprivation to a much wider range of lacks and disadvantages. "Poverty and deprivation" is short for "Poverty and other forms of deprivation".

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3 For a fuller definition, and exploration of the implications for the rich as well as the poor, for the North as well as the South, see Chambers and Conway 1992

"It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways for managing society, the economy and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave"

Vaclav Havel<sup>4</sup>

#### Professionals and the Poor: Whose Reality Counts?

This paper is written as a challenge to all development professionals, including myself, and especially to those who prepare, take part in, and follow up on, the Social Development Summit. It asks: whose reality counts? The reality of the few in centres of power? Or the reality of the many poor at the periphery? It argues that these realities differ more than most recognise. Insights into these differences and their implications are generating a new paradigm and a new and hopeful agenda. To recognise, accept, act on and evolve that new agenda is a personal, professional and institutional challenge, demanding deep change in the ways we think and behave. This requires altruism and reversals of much that is now normal. The Social Development Summit provides an opportunity for this change, for putting first the reality of the poor and making it count. Will the opportunity be recognised and seized?

#### The Context and Record

To start with the context seems right in an overview paper, but for those weary of pedestrian reviews of the human condition, let me recommend skipping to the last paragraph of this section.

Any normal balance sheet of development has to acknowledge achievements. According to the figures presented in table 1, aggregate percentage improvements have been shown in some of the usual indicators of human wellbeing over recent decades<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Condensation of a speech to the Davos Development Conference, reported in the New York Times, 1 March 1992.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller balance sheet, see UNDP Human Development Report 1993 pp 12-13, and Peter Adamson The Progress of Nations, the nations of the world ranked according to their achievements in health, nutrition, education, family planning and progress for women, UNICEF 1993, and subsequent publications in these serials



Table 1. Reported Improvements in Indicators of Human Wellbeing in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

	1960	1990
Life expectancy	46	63
Infant Mortality per 1,000 live births	149	71
Adult literacy rate	46	65
Real GDP per capita \$	950	2,170

Source: HDR 1993:143

Smallpox has been eradicated from the earth, and polio and Guinea Worm disease greatly reduced. In little more than a generation the proportion of rural families with access to safe water is reported to have risen from less than 10 per cent to more than 60 per cent, and the proportion of children in primary school from less than a half to more than three quarters. Facts and figures like these can lull one into an impression of laudable achievement.

The record is, though, appalling. Things are less bad than they would have been had nothing been done, and without the efforts of many organisations and individuals. But the glass that looks half full is also half empty; and as population grows the glass gets bigger. The downside is dreadful. Averages conceal adverse income distribution and the condition of underclasses. Some economies are on a downward slide, especially where there is civil war. Malaria and tuberculosis spread again. The time bomb of HIV menaces whole peoples and economies with its insidious spread. Life expectancy in some countries has fallen, with civil disorder, famine and breakdown in government services. Nearly one billion people remain illiterate, and the primary school drop out rate is 30 percent. Perhaps as many as 40 million people are refugees or displaced within their countries. Globally the number of people conventionally defined as in absolute poverty is often quoted as being over one billion, between one person in five and one in four, as for example in table 2.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Kates and Haarman 1992:6. The source is "the Worldwatch Institute's country estimates of absolute poverty and other social and economic indicators. Estimates should be viewed as midpoints in a range of plus or minus 10 per cent". The figures probably refer to the late 1980s, since when there will have been changes. The point of presenting them here is to indicate relative orders of magnitude by regional location.

Table 2. One Estimate of Population Living in Absolute Poverty

	Number of people (millions)	Percentage of total population
Asia	675	25
Sub-Saharan Africa	325	62
Middle East and North America	75	28
Latin America	150	35
Total	1,225	23

Scholastic argument about figures will have no end. The danger is that debate distracts from seeing what to do. Aggregation and generalisation are tempting and difficult. But trends seem evident: that poverty, suffering and other deprivations are increasingly perceived as diverse; that living conditions are moving in different directions in different countries, and for different groups of people; and that for hundreds of millions of people these have a downward momentum and are becoming worse. Poverty, suffering and deprivation seem to be becoming more regional, concentrated more in those countries which are least able to improve conditions, as in many of Sub-Saharan Africa; or in regions within countries, as with the three Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh with their combined population (1994) of over 300 million. As the scourge of HIV spreads, the hitherto localised impacts of AIDS deaths will soon be regional: 8 million AIDS-related deaths are projected to have occurred by the year 2000<sup>7</sup>, the target year of Health for All. In the longer term, the time bomb of HIV mocks development and makes fantasy of much current debate about development. With AIDS, as in other ways, the South is more exposed and vulnerable, will suffer more, and will be far more devastated than the North.

Illbeing and early death take many forms; and those which are in the news - genocide and civil wars in Rwanda, Angola, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, and the denials of human rights as in Myanmar, Tibet and many other countries, all demand attention. But much more widely, less conspicuous illbeing and early death prevail. Much of it is hidden or taboo, as with the selective elimination, persecution and plight of females - foetuses, girls and women. The enormity of the abuse, sexual and other, of girl children, is still concealed everywhere by the sacred secrecy of the family. Worldwide, and with a concentration in South Asia, there are 110 million missing females, who would have been alive at the sex ratios of the industrial countries. These missing women are almost the total (female and male) population of Pakistan, or four Canadas, or any two together of France, Iran, Italy, Turkey

<sup>7</sup> HIV/AIDS Pandemic 1993 Overview, Global Programme on AIDS, WHO, Geneva. There is much uncertainty about projections, and locally, especially in parts of Africa, the impact is already devastating.

or the UK, or the combined population of Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia. The scale of the discrimination, deprivation and suffering which underlie these figures beggars the imagination.

The scale and awfulness are the worse because as never before the powerful can see so much of what is happening and have power to act. The nightmare foreseen by C.P. Snow in 1959 has come about. Communications have brought us all dramatically closer, and have made it easier and quicker to do things. Now we, the rich, sit in our warm rooms and comfy seats and watch the poor die on television, turning them on and off at will. Frequent viewing inoculates against compassion. There is more insight than ever before, accessible to those who want it, about how to enable poor people to do better, yet many of the same mistakes and misdemeanours persist at every level of interaction. There is more wealth in the world than ever before, and the peace dividend presents a windfall to give. Yet aid declines, and hundreds of millions of the poorest are on a downward slide, to become poorer and more vulnerable.

To those who read this paper, all this will be familiar, even boring. It has all been said before, and will be said again. And one wonders about the diverse and different realities behind the statistics. But in an overview paper, it has seemed right to bow to convention by starting with statements like these.

The excitement comes when we ask whether anything has changed in our insights, and what we should and could now do.

The thrust of this paper is that to see better what to do, "we", the sort of people who are assembled here, have more power to change the world for the better than we normally realise, but that to grasp and use that power we have to question our realities and concepts, explore and embrace a new paradigm, adopt a new professionalism, empower the poor to analyse and express their reality, and then put their reality first.

#### Professional Reality: Rhetoric and Concepts

We are all part of a world system which perpetuates poverty and deprivation. Those who are poor and deprived do not wish to be poor and deprived. We who are well off and who have power say that poverty and deprivation are bad and should be reduced or eliminated. Yet whatever else does not last, poverty and deprivation prove robustly sustainable. Why?

The usual reflex is to seek answers to this question by analysing poverty and deprivation themselves. Papers on the poor proliferate, like this one. And there are many like me, who are not poor, willing to write about those who are. Papers on poverty are commissioned for conferences and roundtables, for symposia and summits. One may speculate on what topics the poor and powerless would commission papers if they could convene conferences and summits: perhaps on greed, hypocrisy and exploitation. But the poor are powerless and cannot and do not convene summits; and those papers are rarely written. It is not surprising. We do not like to examine ourselves. To salve our consciences we rationalise. Neo-liberalism paints greed as inadvertent altruism. The objects of development are anyway the poor, not us. It is they who are the problem, not us. We are the solution. So we hold the spotlight to them (from a safe distance). The poor have no spotlight to hold to us.

But poverty and deprivation are functions of polarisation, of power and powerlessness. Any practical analysis has to examine the whole system: - "us", the powerful, as well as "them" the powerless. Since we have more power to act, it is hard to evade the imperative to turn the spotlight round and look at ourselves.

In doing this, rhetoric and concepts can provide a starting point. Our views of the realities of the poor, and of what should be done, are constructed mainly from a distance, and can be seen to be constructed mainly for our convenience. We embody those views in the words and concepts which we use. Two which receive much prominence, and are much stressed in the outline papers for this Roundtable, are poverty and employment.

#### Thinking about Income-Poverty.

"Poverty" is used in two main senses: in its first, common usage in development, it is a broad, blanket word used to refer to the whole spectrum of deprivation and illbeing; in its second usage, poverty has a narrow technical definition for purposes of measurement and comparison. In the words of one authority, "'poverty' has to be given scientifically acceptable universal meaning and measurement" (Townsend 1993:3). Poverty is then defined as low income, as it is reported, recorded and analysed, or often as low consumption, which is easier to measure. This is the normal meaning of poverty among economists, and is used for measuring poverty lines, for comparing groups and regions, and often for assessing progress or backsliding in development. In this paper it is described as income-poverty.

In much professional discourse the narrow technical definition colonises the common usage. Income-poverty starts as a proxy or correlate for other deprivations, but then subsumes them. What is recorded as having been measured - usually low consumption - then masquerades in speech and prose as the much larger reality. It is then but a short step to treating what has not been measured as not really real. Patterns of dominance are then reinforced: of the material over the experiential; of the physical over the social; of the measured and measurable over the unmeasured and unmeasurable; of economic over social values; of economists over disciplines concerned with people as people. It then becomes the reductionism of normal economics, not the experience of the poor, that defines poverty.

The pre-eminence of income-poverty seems wrong. But it is understandable. Standing back, four reasons can be seen for its widespread acceptance and use as a measure and concept.

First, economists and their concepts still dominate the development discourse. There can be few multilateral or bilateral aid agencies, and few ministries of planning, where economists are not the most numerous profession (unless accountants). Economists' concepts, measures and methods are accepted as the norm in much development practice and policy-making. This is not to undervalue the utility of economic concepts and methods. But it is to note that one way of seeing things prevails, and what is poverty to economists tends to become the normal meaning and measure for other disciplines and professions.

Second, income-poverty is a concept and measure generated and sustained in the cores of power, reflecting and reinforced by conditions in the rich industrial North. Poor people in the North have been mainly urban, in an industrial milieu, and have tended to rely on cash income, whether wages or social security payments; so much of their economic status can be captured in cash income, or largely cash-based consumption. Projecting and applying this Northern concept of poverty to the South assumes that similar conditions prevail.

Third, poverty defined as income-poverty or consumption-poverty is measurable. Non-monetary flows for subsistence or consumption can in principle be given monetary values and conflated into a single scale. This permits comparisons worldwide between the income, or more usually consumption, levels of different households, regions and nations. It also makes possible the measurement and assessment of poverty lines (meaning income-poverty or consumption-poverty lines). These provide time series measurements to show how income-poverty or consumption-poverty are changing, and so how well a government can be presumed to be doing in the reduction of poverty in these senses. The utility of these measures for centrally placed professionals gives them a primacy and pride of place which tends to go unquestioned. What is measurable and measured then becomes what is real, standardising the diverse, and excluding the divergent and different.

Fourth, it is held that the worse off people are, the more they are preoccupied with income and consumption, with the need to gain subsistence food and basic goods in order to survive. In a recent article, Martin Greeley argued for an income-based concept of welfare, and that "...only when absolute poverty [meaning absolute income-poverty] is no longer the core issue should our measure of development encompass a broader agenda of human need" (Greeley 1994:57).

Given these four factors and beliefs, it is not surprising to find that income-poverty has some primacy as a measure in the World Bank. A widely quoted statement by Lewis Preston, President of the World Bank (in the foreword to the Poverty Reduction Handbook (World Bank 1993c) illustrates this:

"Sustainable poverty reduction is the overarching objective of the World Bank. It is the benchmark by which our performance as a development institution will be measured."

The overarching objective is defined as something which will be measured - sustainable poverty reduction. The Handbook elaborates on this thinking, giving primacy to the technical meaning of poverty as income-poverty, which becomes the end or objective of development. Thus the Preface states that "investments in human resources help to increase incomes and reduce poverty" (my emphasis). The World Development Report 1990's approach to sustainable poverty reduction is, it says, two-pronged, consisting of "broadly based economic growth, to generate efficient income-earning opportunities for the poor, and improved access to education, health care, and other social services, so the poor can take advantage of these opportunities" (my emphasis). In this thinking, income is the end; improved access to education, health care, and other social services are justified as means to that economic end. They are not presented here as justified as ends in themselves, or as

means to enhanced capabilities or reduced suffering, or to self-respect, fulfilment or other human values (all hard to measure). Social development is a means not an end; the end is economic development.

That the World Bank states sustainable poverty reduction, and not just being a good bank, to be its overarching objective is a matter for celebration. Nor should the narrowness and circularity of the thinking be cause for surprise in an organisation which is called a bank, with many economists, and conditioned by the normal economic thinking. But Preston's quite simple statement contrasts with the mission statements of several bilateral agencies. One example is that of the Overseas Development Administration of the British Government, where social development advisers are relatively more numerous and influential:

"The aim of our overseas aid effort is to promote sustainable economic and social development and good government, in order to improve the quality of life and reduce poverty, suffering and deprivation in developing countries"

(FCO 1992:28)

By going beyond economic development to include social development and good government, and beyond reducing poverty to improving the quality of life and reducing suffering and deprivation, this embodies a much broader set of values.

Few would want to deny that measures of income-poverty have uses. They point to one dimension of inequality and inequity, between nations and within nations. But income-poverty is only one measure of many, and it is suspect because it serves the needs of professionals in the cores of power, rather than emerging from the realities of the poor at the peripheries.

#### Thinking about Employment

As with poverty, so with employment, the normal professional categories have been applied worldwide. Employment, unemployment, job, workplace and workforce are concepts and categories derived from urban industrial experience in the North. As with poverty, attempts have been made to impose and apply them in the South, including the rural and agricultural South. Perhaps this will become more marked now that the North is so preoccupied with its own unemployment. In his magisterial work on Asian poverty, a quarter of a century ago, Gunnar Myrdal agonised over the misleading preconception of Western economics as applied to Asian conditions:

"When new data are assembled, the conceptual categories used are inappropriate to the conditions existing: as, for example, when the underutilization of the labour force in the South Asian countries is analysed according to Western concepts of unemployment, disguised unemployment, and underemployment. The resulting mountains of figures have either no meaning or a meaning other than that imputed to them...The very fact that the researcher gets figures to play with tends to confirm his original, biased approach...the continuing collection of data under biased notions only postpones the day when reality can effectively challenge inherited preconceptions."

(Myrdal 1968)

And he called (vol 2: 1027) for behavioural studies founded on observations of the raw reality.

Since Myrdal wrote, the informal sector has been discovered and explored, and livelihood has been proposed as a better word than employment to capture the complex and diverse reality of the poor. But employment thinking remains alive, strong, and, by some, universally applied. In the background note identifying topics and concerns on which papers are invited for this Roundtable, the third section is entitled "Expansion of Productive Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods". But in the whole document the word livelihood appears only twice, compared with employment 28 times, unemployment 11, underemployment 5, jobs 6 and workforce 4, all words and concepts derived from and linked with formal employment. Employment-thinking is deep-rooted. Whatever happens to the poor, full employment seems assured for normal economists and statisticians as they continue to analyse the available data on employment and unemployment, and to project their categories and concerns onto the raw and rather different reality of most of the poor in the South. Myrdal would be sad to learn how little has changed.

#### Offsetting Normal Professional Biases

Efforts have been made to offset the biases towards the income measure of poverty and deprivation, and towards an employment measure of livelihood.

Those offsetting income-poverty are well known. The World Bank's World Development Reports, since their inception, have ranked countries according to per capita GDP. However, the weak relationship between per capita GDP and human wellbeing is a commonplace. Income distribution is critical. Much of the good life is uncounted in GDP (friendship, love, story-telling, self-sacrifice, laughter, music, health, creativity...) and much of the bad life adds to it (insurance claims, security guards, fossil fuel consumption, cutting down forests...) <sup>8</sup>. Very different perspectives have been given by UNICEF's annual State of the World's Children which ranks countries according to their under-5 mortality; by the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) which combines in a single scale life expectancy at one year, adult literacy and infant mortality; the human development index (HDI) of UNDP's annual Human Development Report which combines per capita GDP, life expectancy at birth, and literacy; and by the World Bank itself, with its Social Indicators of Development 1993 which lists poverty indicators such as public expenditure on social services, immunisation, and fertility rates.

All these show up weaknesses in the correlations between income-poverty and some other deprivations. Strikingly, the latest Human Development Report (HDR 1994:15) shows Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Guinea all with per capita incomes in the \$400-\$500 range, but life expectancies of, respectively, 71, 65, 58 and 44, and infant mortality rates of, respectively, 24, 53, 99 and 135. Whatever the criticisms of these measures and scales, they have been useful for comparisons and critical in forcing reflection on priorities.

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8 This is the footnote with the letter from Bob Lack

Efforts to offset the bias towards employment measures are less developed. Livelihoods are harder to measure than mortality rates, life expectancy, or literacy. So they are treated as less real. Labour-intensive growth as an objective is designed to increase employment, and may indeed do so. But it is not the same as sustainable livelihood-intensity where livelihoods depend on a multiplicity of activities and resources.

The root problem is that professionals and poor people seek, experience and construct different realities. Some contrasting tendencies are summarised in table 3.

Table 3. Contrasting Tendencies in Professional and Poor People's Realities

<u>Professionals'</u>	<u>Poor People's</u>
universal	local, specific
simplified	complex
reductionist	holistic
standardised	diverse
physical	experiential
quantified	unquantified
income-poverty	multi-dimensional deprivation
employment	livelihood

The view from on high seeks and sees sameness and simplifying stereotypes.

The World Bank, highest<sup>9</sup> of us all  
Looks down to see poor people small  
Like atoms all, a shape and size  
For which it's right to standardise

The question is whether concepts and measures that are universal, standardised, measurable, generated by and designed for conditions in the urban industrial North can be universally applied in the more rural and agricultural South, and whether they fit or distort the diverse and complex realities of most of the poor.

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9 With apologies to the IMF, the President of the United States, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.



### The Realities of the Poor

A person who is not poor who pronounces on what matters to those who are poor is in a trap. Self-critical analysis, sensitive rapport, and participatory methods can contribute some valid insight into the values, priorities and preferences of poor people. We can struggle to reconstruct our realities to reflect what poor people indicate to be theirs. But there will always be distortions. We can never fully escape from our conditioning. And the nature of interactions between the poor and the non-poor affect what is shared and learnt. In what follows, however much I try, I cannot avoid being wrong in substance and emphasis. For I am trying to generalise about what is local (and both rural and urban), complex, diverse, dynamic, personal, and multidimensional, and to do this from scattered evidence and experience, perceived, filtered and fitted together inevitably in a personally idiosyncratic way. Error is inherent in the enterprise. There must always be doubts. But if the reality of poor people is to count more, we have to dare to try to know it better.

Help comes from field researchers, especially social anthropologists, from those who have been facilitating new participatory methods of appraisal, and increasingly from poor people themselves. The new methods enable poor people to analyse and express what they know, experience, need and want. They bring to light many dimensions of deprivation, illbeing and wellbeing, and the values and priorities of poor people. Three sets of findings provide illustrative insights:

#### i. Jodha's paradox: income-poorer but better off

N.S. Jodha (1988) asked farmers and villagers in two villages in Rajasthan for their own categories and criteria of changing economic status. They named 38 criteria. Comparing data from his fieldwork in 1964-66 with 1982-4 he found that the 36 households which were more than 5 per cent worse off in per capita real incomes were on average better off according to 37 out of their own 38 criteria. (The one exception was consumption of milk, more of which was being sold outside the village). The improvements included quality of housing, wearing shoes regularly, less dependence in the lean season, and not having to migrate for work (see table 4). Several of the criteria reflected more independence.

Table 4. Indicators of wellbeing in two Rajasthan villages, of households whose per capita real income declined 5 per cent or more over two decades

	Percentage of the 36 households	
	1963-6	1982-4
With one or more members working as attached or semi-attached	37	7
Residing on patron's land or yard	31	0
Taking seed loans from patrons	34	9
Taking loans from others besides patrons	13	47
Marketing farm produce only through patrons	86	23
With members seasonally out-migrating for job	34	11
Selling over 80 per cent of their marketed produce during the post-harvest period	100	46
Making cash purchases during slack-season festivals etc	6	51
With adults skipping third meal in the day during the summer (scarcity period)	86	20
Where women and children wear shoes regularly	0	86
With houses with only impermanent traditional structure	91	34
With separate provision of stay for humans and animals	6	52

Source: Jodha, 1988

The reality which these income-poorer villagers presented to Jodha contrasts with a normal economist's reality. They were income-poorer, and so in an economist's terms worse off; but in their own terms, they were on average much better off.

ii. Findings from participatory analysis

Analysis by local people using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods have shown similar outcomes.

In a PRA process in a Pakistan village in April 1994 (pers comm Rashida Dohad)

"the local people did a matrix on their existing sources of income to determine the preferred income source. Interestingly, for me, the criterion "more income" was the 9th or 10th one listed (out of a total of about 20 criteria). "More time at home", "ability to get involved in neighbours' joys and sorrows" were listed earlier...the generally perceived-to-be-preferred source of income (high-paying skilled/manual labour in the Middle Eastern countries, particularly Dubai) did not emerge as victor..., the reason worked out by the local analysts being that it did badly on their social criteria."

Diverse criteria have also emerged from wellbeing ranking, one of the methods of PRA. In an economic tradition, "wealth" was originally the criterion by which local people were asked to card sort the households in their community (Grandin 1988). Repeatedly, when outsider facilitators have tried to focus discussion and ranking on wealth, local people have insisted on using a wider range of criteria as contributing to their concepts of wellbeing and illbeing, of the good and bad life (Mukherjee 1992; Schaefer 1992; Sarch 1992: A. and J. Rajaratnam pers comm). Health and physical disability feature strongly. A range of criteria from various sources is presented in box A:

Box A:

A short illustrative list of some criteria used by local people in wellbeing grouping and ranking: a selection from sources in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa

(expressed here in the negative form)

- \* Disabled (eg blind, crippled, mentally impaired, chronically sick)
- \* Widowed
- \* Lacking land, livestock, farm equipment, grinding mill....
- \* Cannot decently bury their dead
- \* Cannot send children to school
- \* Having more mouths-to-feed, fewer hands-to-help
- \* Lacking able-bodied members who can fend for their families in the event of crisis
- \* With bad housing
- \* Having vices (e.g. alcoholism)
- \* Being "poor in people", lacking social supports
- \* Having to put children in employment
- \* Single parents
- \* Having to accept demeaning or low status work
- \* Having food security for only a few months each year
- \* Being dependent on common property resources

Sources include Sarch 1992, Redd Barna 1993, A. Rajaratnam and J. Rajaratnam pers comm. 1993.

### iii. Participatory Poverty Assessments

The World Bank has been breaking new ground in its Poverty Assessments. In the words of Sven Sandstrom (1994:13) these are designed

"to help us to address three fundamental issues: Who is poor? Why are they poor? What needs to be done to reduce the number of the poor?"

The Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) conducted under the auspices of the World Bank in Ghana, Zambia and Kenya, and some other countries now have the potential for going beyond these questions, to ask: Who defines poverty? Who are the poor as defined within a society by local people themselves? What criteria of poverty or deprivation do they have? What are their priorities?

The PPA sponsored by the World Bank in Zambia (Norton, Owen and Milimo 1994), using PRA techniques, gave insights about conditions, trends and poor people's priorities with practical implications. To illustrate some of the range:

- \* health was repeatedly and consistently given a higher priority than education. Indeed, education was not raised as a priority need in most communities
- \* payment of school fees was found to be required at the most difficult time of the year, coinciding with food shortages, heavy work in agriculture, indebtedness, expenditures for Christmas, and high incidence of disease
- \* the rudeness of health staff was a deterrent to poor people going for treatment
- \* food-for-work at bad times was highly valued
- \* all weather roads were desired not only for marketing but also to give access to clinics and hospitals during the rains
- \* mangoes are good because they provide food at the worst times of the year

Insights such as these indicate actions - postponing school fee payments, training health staff to be more caring, food for work for all-weather roads, improving and spreading mangoes and similar tree food crops - with high benefits in poor people's own terms for relatively low financial costs.

### Dimensions of Deprivation

These and other examples illustrate the multi-dimensionality of deprivation and disadvantage as poor people experience them. Deprived people are often thought of as being uniform. The "rural masses" commonly expresses a stereotype. But if anything there is more diversity among the poor than among the non-poor. Under extreme deprivation, as Viktor Frankl found in his study of inmates of concentration camps, people react in sharply different ways. Disadvantage itself takes many forms. Any list of dimensions will be provisional and personal. The eight which follow are an attempt to capture some of poor people's reality, but can surely be improved upon. Of the eight, the first three are better recognised.

The three better recognised dimensions of deprivation are:

1. Poverty refers to lack of physical necessities, assets, and income. It includes but is more than being income-poor. Poverty can be distinguished from other dimensions of deprivation such as physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness.
2. Social inferiority can be ascribed, acquired, or linked with age and life-cycle. It can be socially defined as genetically inferior or disadvantaged, including gender, caste, race and ethnic group, or being a "lower" in terms of class, social group or occupation, or linked with age, as with children and sometimes daughters-in-law.
3. Isolation refers to being peripheral and cut off. Poor people can be isolated geographically - living in a "remote" area; isolated in communication, lacking contacts and information, including not being able to read; isolated in lack of access to social services and markets; and isolated in lack of social and economic supports.

Five other dimensions prominent in the realities of the poor and weak have been relatively neglected by the development professions.

4. Physical weakness. Professionals, dependent as they are on their brains more than their bodies, tend to undervalue the importance to many of the poor of the asset of a fit, strong body, and the liability of a body which is sick, weak or disabled. Repeatedly, in defining illbeing and wellbeing, poor people mention physical weakness, sickness or disability, both as bad in themselves and bad in their effects on others. Having a household member who is physically weak, sick or handicapped, unable to contribute to household livelihood, but needing to be fed and cared for, is a common cause of income-poverty and deprivation, as graphically shown for river-blindness (Evans 1989) and now spreading widely in new forms with AIDS. The prominence of disability in the consciousness of poor people in the South is shown by the frequency with which, in participatory social mapping, village analysts spontaneously represent the disabled as a category. Those who are sick are a concern of health services. Those who are otherwise disabled are numerous, yet neglected. There are perhaps 200 million disabled persons in the South (Helander 1993)<sup>10</sup>, and probably more than another 200 million impoverished and adversely affected through having to support the disabled. Yet the UNDP Human Development Report 1993 does not include disability in any of its tables. The disabled are among the most unseen, and politically powerless, and not only in the South.

5. Vulnerability. Much prose uses "vulnerable" and "poor" as alternating synonyms. But vulnerability is not the same as income-poverty or poverty more broadly defined. It means not lack or want, but defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to contingencies. It has two sides: the external side of exposure to risk, shocks and stress, and the internal side of defencelessness,

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10 Personal communication Barbara Harriss-White, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, who is preparing a paper on "The Political Economy of Disability and Development"